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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: GUATEMALAN GOVERNMENT PROMISES ADDITIONAL SECURITY  
FOR BANANA UNION LEADERS

REF: GUATEMALA 2172

This is sensitive but unclassified. Protect accordingly.

11. (U) Embassy Labor Officer met October 29 with the Secretary General of the Guatemalan food workers federation

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(FESTRAS), Secretary General of the Banana Workers Union of Izabal (SITRABI), Regional Secretary of the Geneva-based International Union of Food Workers (UITA), and AFL-CIO Solidarity Center Representative for Central America to follow up on the murder of SITRABI leader Marco Ramirez and security concerns raised by SITRABI (reftel).

12. (U) Visiting UITA Regional Secretary Gerardo Iglesias reported positive results from his four-day mission to Guatemala in support of SITRABI. Bandegua/Del Monte, SITRABI, and UITA have agreed to create a permanent commission to address security and other issues. Iglesias also reported that the Ministry of Government was working on logistics to improve security on Bandegua farms and to protect SITRABI leaders from further threats and intimidation.

13. (SBU) Iglesias expressed his positive initial impression of Minister of Government Torrebiarte based on his two meetings, which he described as very productive. On October 29, Torrebiarte promised to provide National Civil Police (PNC) officers for perimeter security of Bandegua farms, particularly in the most vulnerable areas near entry access points, and a 24-hour roving patrol of the neighborhoods where SITRABI Executive Committee members and Marco Ramirez' family reside.

14. (SBU) Iglesias had a less favorable impression of the Public Ministry. He characterized the prosecutor with whom they met as "arrogant, mediocre, and unprepared." He said that the prosecutor explained that the Public Ministry's decision to accept or reject a complaint is based on the origin of the crime, not on the profession or affiliation of the victim, and that the Public Ministry was working under the assumption that the murder in this case was political in nature rather than union-related.

15. (U) SITRABI Secretary General Noe Ramirez indicated that they intend to submit the case to the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG) for investigation. Laboff suggested that they make direct contact with the CICIG Commissioner to highlight the case.  
Derham